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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SANTIAGO 000826

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/BSC, INR, INL, S/CT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/27/2019

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SUBJECT: MYTH VS. REALITY IN CHILE'S MAPUCHE CONFLICT

REF: 08 SANTIAGO 856

Classified By: A/DCM Laurie Weitzenkorn for reason 1.4 (B).

11. (C) Summary: Despite sensationalist press coverage and a popular image of bloody conflict in Chile's southern Mapuche heartland, poloffs found that relations between indigenous and non-indigenous communities were largely non-violent, if often tense and distrustful. Three people -- all Mapuche activists -- have died in the so-called Mapuche conflict over the past ten years. Arson, vandalism, and peaceful protests and non-violent activism have been far more common. Opposition politicians have alleged links between the Mapuche and foreign terrorist organizations FARC and ETA, but government officials downplay these connections as mere "guerrilla tourism." End Summary.

12. (U) Poloff and Pol Specialist traveled to the heart of Chile's Mapuche territory, the regions of Araucania and Los Rios, August 10-14. This trip happened to coincide with the death of a Mapuche activist, Jaime Mendoza, at the hands of a police officer in a conflict in Araucania on August 12, further focusing domestic political attention on Mapuche unrest. This is the first in a series of cables based on meetings with urban and rural Mapuche community members, government officials, church leaders, academics and civil society members during this trip. Septels will describe Mapuche demands and human rights issues.

"Araucania in Flames" and Other Sensationalism

13. (SBU) A casual observer of Chilean news coverage could be forgiven for thinking that violent Mapuche activists with strong and active links to the FARC and ETA are killing innocent civilians each week in the so-called "Mapuche conflict." Opposition presidential candidate Sebastian Pinera has declared that "Araucania is in flames." Chile's major newspapers, which are generally conservative in their political outlook, frequently run reports of conflict related to indigenous concerns prominently on the front page. Destruction of property -- which accounts for the vast majority of all illegal Mapuche action -- is often displayed in full color and with bold headlines, sometimes beating out coverage of more severe crimes committed by non-indigenous Chileans. Moreover, positive or less incendiary news from indigenous communities -- resolution of localized conflicts, peaceful protests, meetings, or other actions taken to address Mapuche political concerns -- are often not covered at all.

Conflicts Over Ancestral Lands

14. (SBU) Unsurprisingly, conflicts over ancestral lands are the most frequent flash point for clashes. The Chilean government's colonization policy of the late 1800s, known as the "Pacification of the Araucania," led to the first real conquest of Mapuche territory, which had never been under Spanish control. Mapuches were pushed off the best agricultural lands, which the Chilean government auctioned off. Land reforms in the 1960s and 70s benefited Mapuche communities as well as other landless farmers, but were largely rolled back under Pinochet. Preparation for the return to democracy led to a new deal between then candidate Patricio Aylwin and indigenous communities in 1989. Aylwin's victory was followed by a new indigenous law in 1993 that included mechanisms for transferring indigenous land back to indigenous communities. However, the ensuing 16 years have brought slow progress on land acquisitions and transfers, contributing to a Mapuche vision of 100 years of broken promises from the Chilean state.

Social Protest or Domestic Terrorism?

15. (SBU) In contrast to the sensationalist news coverage, the reality of relations between the indigenous Mapuche community, their non-indigenous neighbors, and the Chilean state is complex and sometimes contentious, but overwhelmingly non-violent. While the Chilean public associates Mapuches with rural areas of Araucania and neighboring regions, 70% of Mapuche live in urban areas. Santiago is home to more Mapuches than any other region. Confrontations between Mapuches and others in Santiago are rare, and many Mapuches go about their daily lives without highlighting their ethnic background. Outside of Santiago

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many Mapuche communities have peaceful but tense relations with their neighbors and the Chilean government. Frustration and distrust are common, particularly in rural communities in the regions of Bio Bio, Araucania, and Los Rios. Some communities are engaged in non-violent activism.

16. (SBU) According to Interior Under Secretary Patricio Rosende, 27 of Chile's 2,100 Mapuche communities are actively in conflict with landowners or the Chilean government. Eight of those 27 conflicts have turned violent. Since 1990, when the Mapuche community began pressing the newly democratic state for more rights and restitution of ancestral lands, three people have died as a direct result of the Mapuche conflict. All of the deaths have been young Mapuche activists killed by Chilean police: Alex Lemun, a 17-year old killed in 2002; Matrias Catrileo, a 23-year old killed in January 2008; and Jaime Mendoza, a 24-year old killed on August 12, 2009.

17. (SBU) While violence targeting people remains rare, vandalism and destruction of property are more common techniques used by communities in conflict. A single piece of land, owned by Rene Urban but claimed by Mapuche communities, has been occupied by Mapuche activists 62 times, and has been subject to arson and other forms of property destruction. Frequent attacks against property and investment projects contribute to the lack of economic development in the zone. Araucania has the highest poverty and unemployment rates in the nation. The president of the Temuco Agricultural Promotion Society recently told the press, "No one in his right mind would invest today in Araucania."

"Guerrilla Tourism" or Expanding Terrorist Networks?:
Alleged Links to FARC and ETA

18. (C) In meetings with Poloff August 24 and 20, both Rosende and National Prosecutor's Office International Affairs Director Jorge Chocair played down allegations of ties between Mapuches -- particularly the often violent group

Coordinadora Arauco Malleco (CAM) -- and foreign terrorist organizations like the FARC or ETA. Yes, some CAM members have traveled to Colombia, Spain, and southern Mexico, and may have even participated in some training camps run by these foreign organizations, they said. A handful of representatives from Askapena, ETA's political arm, visited Mapuche communities in August 2009. However, Rosende and Chocair both characterized these relationships as relatively casual and infrequent, with Chocair describing it as "guerrilla tourism:" traveling to rebel-held areas of a third country for photos and meetings with little follow up.

¶9. (C) Rosende and Chocair both claim that the CAM barely exists now, thanks to a number of high-profile arrests of alleged CAM leaders. (Note: A September 1 press report alleges that the CAM is recruiting urban Mapuches to assume leadership roles in the organization. End note.) Jaime Lopez, an Araucania-based public defender specializing in Mapuche defendants, expressed his doubts to Poloffs on August 11 that the CAM was ever a terrorist organization, noting that three successive court cases failed to demonstrate that they had organized any terrorist activity.

¶10. (C) In contrast to these views from administration officials, opposition leaders -- including presidential candidate Sebastian Pinera -- have sought to emphasize the connections between the Mapuche and terrorist organizations. During an August 19 meeting with Poloffs, Senator Alberto Espina stated that the Interior Ministry has evidence of FARC links to Chile, including dates and routes of travel for 8-10 Mapuche individuals who attended FARC training camps. (Note: Reftel describes Pinera and Espina's role in publicizing a May 2008 Colombian intelligence report alleging links between FARC rebels and Chilean communists, Mapuche activists, and others in Chile. End note.)

¶11. (C) COMMENT: Disagreements between the Mapuche community, non-Mapuche landowners, and the Chilean state are serious and merit attention. At a minimum, such conflict traps indigenous and non-indigenous community members alike in a cycle of distrust, hindering economic development in the region and preventing the full inclusion of Mapuches in Chilean society. However, even with the most recent death of a young Mapuche activist, the large-scale violent unrest that many Chileans project on the region is overblown. Similarly, despite vocal allegations in the press, the opposition has

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yet to produce credible evidence that there is significant and on-going cooperation between the Mapuche community and FARC and ETA terrorists. END COMMENT.
SIMONS